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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000279

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR ACTING A/S WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEAGEA STATES CONCERN ABOUT VIOLENCE TO  
AA/S FELTMAN AND NSC SR DIRECTOR SHAPIRO

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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1. (C) One day after meetings with top Syrian officials in Damascus, NEA Acting A/S Feltman and NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa Shapiro returned to Beirut on March 8 to continue meetings with top Lebanese religious and political leaders. In a meeting with March 14 and Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea at his residence in Maarab, Feltman and Shapiro described talks in Syria as "comprehensive." A A/S Feltman and Senior Director Shapiro told Geagea that the U.S. message to the Syrians on Lebanon had been clear: the U.S. was unwilling to negotiate with Syria at the expense of Lebanon. Lebanon's independence and sovereignty would remain key goals in the new administration and the U.S. would not accept any intimidation or interference in Lebanon from its neighbors.

2. (C) Geagea, accompanied by his advisor Elie Khoury and his wife, MP Strida Geagea, enumerated his concerns with the Syrians, describing the risk of violence as the biggest issue. Geagea also sought solutions to the Palestinian military bases on the border with Syria, border delineation, the status of Lebanese detainees in Syrian jails, and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. On Lebanese detainees in Syrian jails, Geagea opined that movement on the issue ahead of elections would not empower Christian opposition MP Michel Aoun. Acting A/S Feltman, NSC Senior Director Shapiro, and the Ambassador were accompanied by visiting NEA Staff Assistant, DCM, Pol/Econ Chief, PolEconOff and senior Political LES. MP Samir Franjieh, March 14 SYG Fares Souaid, and Geagea's cousin, businessman Jean Geagea, joined the group for lunch.

RE-CAPPING SYRIA TRIP

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3. (C) A A/S Feltman described his previous day's meetings in Syria as constructive and covering a wide range of topics. He stressed the Syrians would have left the meeting very aware that the U.S. was unwilling to "sell out" Lebanon for any price. The U.S. envoys did not carry to Damascus a new U.S. policy, Feltman said; tactics had changed, but the issues between the U.S. and Syrian remained the same. The President and Secretary want to see if engagement can address our concerns. During the meeting with Geagea and with press

after, A A/S Feltman stated the U.S. views engagement with Syria as another way to protect Lebanon. Feltman emphasized that "Lebanon is for the Lebanese," and all decisions affecting Lebanon should be made by the Lebanese.

14. (C) Feltman explained that the U.S. administration sought to use engagement as a tool that would bring results. The next three months, in the run-up to elections in Lebanon, would provide a key window to determine any behavior change on the part of Syria. Feltman and Shapiro noted that if Lebanese elections occurred without Syrian interference and intimidation, further progress between the U.S. and Syria could be possible.

#### WORRIED ABOUT VIOLENCE

15. (C) Geagea expressed concern about recent incidents of violence in Lebanon, mentioning violence following the February 14 Hariri commemoration, hand grenades thrown at LF offices, and rocket attacks from southern Lebanon toward Israel. On the possibility of assassinations before June 7 elections, Geagea assessed the Syrians would not risk killing "just an MP." However, he said if Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, Sunni leader Saad Hariri, or Geagea himself became open targets, the Syrians would risk international repercussions in favor of an altered playing field in Lebanon.

16. (C) A A/S Feltman emphasized that the U.S. and the international community would not tolerate assassinations in

BEIRUT 00000279 002 OF 003

Lebanon. Geagea countered that the Syrians had killed former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri even after a Saudi warning that Damascus would be held accountable for Hariri's safety. If the price is worth it again, Geagea assessed the Syrians would risk their relationships with France and the U.S. Additionally, Geagea noted that Lebanese elections presented a "threat to Syrian prestige." Damascus would not tolerate Christian opposition MP Aoun's defeat in elections after he had linked himself to Syria. A loss by Aoun would send the "wrong message" to all Christians in Lebanon for the Syrians, Geagea said.

17. (C) Continuing his list of Lebanon's top issues with Syria, Geagea noted the Palestinian military bases in Lebanon. He argued weapons could only enter Lebanon through Syria, since the UNIFIL maritime force patrols the sea and UNIFIL land forces protect the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line. Geagea opined that Hamas' arms in Lebanon have increased in recent months. All or at least some of the weapons Syria sends to the Palestinians end up in the hands of extremists, Geagea said. Feltman and Shapiro said they had raised with the Syrians the issue of the Palestinian bases, but the Syrians had responded that the bases were "not their concern."

#### BORDER DELINEATION

18. (C) Geagea argued declarations of Lebanese ownership of Sheba'a Farms were useless. He supported the signing of a joint Syrian-Lebanese document agreeing that the land is Lebanese, and then sending this to the UN. This process would put Sheba'a Farms under UNSCR 425, which calls for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon. Since Israel has agreed to comply with UNSCR 425, they would withdraw from Sheba'a, Geagea reasoned. A A/S Feltman noted that he and Shapiro had raised the issue of border delineation during his trip to Syria, he said, but unsurprisingly the Syrians expressed their preference to start border delineation from the north, not in the south near Sheba'a.

#### DETAINEES NOT JUST FOR AOUN

¶9. (C) Geagea also urged a solution to the issue of Lebanese prisoners in Syria. A A/S Feltman acknowledged that, of Geagea's listed concerns, detainees was the only issue the U.S. envoys had not raised in Syria. Feltman asked Geagea whether movement on Lebanese detainees in Syria would be a victory for Christian opposition MP Michel Aoun, particularly before June elections. Geagea said Aoun, in fact, was "on the defensive" on the detainee issue, and positive steps by the Syrians would not benefit him. The transfer should occur between the Lebanese and Syrian governments, Geagea stressed.

#### SPECIAL TRIBUNAL DRAGGING?

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¶10. (C) Geagea expressed concern about the progress of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL). He questioned whether the international staff were committed to the investigation and worried that little progress had been made. A A/S Feltman assured Geagea that the investigation seemed to be progressing, although not so fast that it might provide political benefit to March 14 before elections. While noting that the professional discretion of Prosecutor Bellemare meant that the USG was not aware of the details of the case, Feltman and the Ambassador reported that numerous STL requests for U.S. assistance and information indicated the STL was making progress and pursuing leads. Geagea seemed reassured by these views.

#### STILL DISPLEASED WITH G-2 FADEL

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¶11. (C) Geagea raised concerns about the leadership of the LAF G-2 Intelligence Directorate. G-2 Chief Edmund Fadel, although a "nice guy," had no experience in intelligence and was too weak to exert authority over Shia deputy G-2 Col.

BEIRUT 00000279 003 OF 003

Abbas Ibrahim, who is "tied by Hizballah on one side and Syria on the other," according to Geagea. Geagea accused the G2 of failing to follow networks with links to Syria or Hizballah. To fix the problem, Geagea recommended replacing Fadel with someone stronger. (Note: President Sleiman and DefMin Murr selected Fadel over Geagea's pro-LF candidate BG Maroun Hiti. Embassy assessment is that BG Fadel is doing an excellent job in leading the G-2's counter terror efforts with respect to Sunni extremists and AQ-related individuals and cells. End note.)

#### ELECTION TIDBITS

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12 (C) Before the official meeting and during lunch, discussion turned to wider Lebanese politics. Asking Feltman and Shapiro about their meeting March 6 with former Prime Minister Najib Mikati, Geagea suggested Mikati's relationship with Syria could be weakening because, according to Geagea, Mikati was "committed" to voting with March 14. Geagea said the electoral arrangement in Tripoli involving Sunni leaders Mikati, Saad Hariri and Commerce Minister Mohammed Safadi had been settled. However, Geagea's advisor Elie Khoury told emboffs before the meeting that there were some disagreements over the two Christian seats in Tripoli.

¶13. (C) Khoury said LF and Kataeb had reached an "understanding" for the March 14 list in Batroun. Zahle was "settled" and Aley was "under construction," Khoury evasively noted. Geagea and Khoury both expressed concern about whether Nemaat Frem would agree to run in Kserwan, which they favored to take Christian support there away from Aoun. Geagea offered cautious faith in Christian heavyweight Michel Murr's pro-March 14 stance in the Metn, but noted Michel Murr would look out for his own interests. If offered more seats by Aoun, Murr would flip, Geagea stated.

¶14. (U) NEA Acting Assistant Secretary Jeffrey D. Feltman and

NSC Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa have  
cleared this message.

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